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Giles Coren reviews Lussmanns in The Times Magazine on 29 October 2011.

[The first part of Giles Coren's review was not about Lussmanns. This section has been removed to avoid confusion. You can read the full review [online](#)].

...I thus set off for Lussmanns in St Albans yesterday desperately hoping it would be okay. At this late stage in the week, I'd have to review it no matter what. And you never know with a three-outlet mini-chain across St Albans, Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. In my experience there's only about a 15 per cent chance of such a place being worth a damn.

I was in the area to meet up with my friend Neil, a psychiatrist. Not my psychiatrist. Just a psychiatrist. But he is always prepared to talk about the inside of my head, which is a favourite topic of mine. And he seems not to mind the busman's holiday element of it. He's semi-retired now, so I guess the offer of some grilled fish and a bottle of rosé on a quiet Monday gets you more of his attention than it once might have.

From a brief tweet and google, Lussmanns had presented itself as the best option. Neil had suggested D'Arcy's, a long-standing local favourite, but that looked less my sort of thing. Lussmanns makes a big deal on its website about local sourcing, sustainability and thoughtful fishing, and Neil had been there plenty and was not averse.

It's only a half-hour potter northwards on the train from Kentish Town on what I've always called "the murder train". But that may be harsh. Why should a rattling, sparsely populated, overground suburban train make me fear the cold blade of a silent assassin? You'd have to ask a psychiatrist.

Lussmanns was a three-tier steel and glass affair with a lot of light, nice and clean, good loos, sensible fish and grill-based menu, doing good business for a Monday lunch. It's on the edge of the old, very pretty centre of the town, hard by the Abbey and gorgeous Vintry Garden (seeing its name I thought of my late, Czech grandmother, Isabel, who would have asked how the garden came to be Vintry even in summer...).

There were "South Coast devilled sprats" on the specials menu which the well-informed Italian waitress said were fresh in that morning. Even on a Monday? Yes, every day. Except Sunday, of course. They have a special relationship with the fishmonger. And so I took the risk (an old sprat is a dreadful thing) and was rewarded with lovely fat little fish, a dozen of them, headless, lightly crumbed, nicely fried, full of sweetness and life. The accompanying lemon mayo was a bit feeble. The squid was fresh, too, though less thrilling, small and grilled on rocket with olive oil. A wild rabbit and apricot terrine was rich and sweet, a little bit underpowered, but pretty to look at.

To my greedy eye, the free-range chicken schnitzel and the woodland-reared, free-range pork from Sussex, also available schnitzelled, were the most appealing-looking mains. And if I'd known when I ordered how good the sprat-frying would be, I'd have gone that way. But I went a bit healthier and got a good, grainy bouillabaisse in a wide, flat bowl with a strong stock, small, sweet mussels, a nice fat piece of grey mullet, fried first, and a lovely sweet piece of pollock poached in the stew itself. People will bang on about ancient recipes, and the importance of rascasse and any old nonsense you'll listen to, but a well-balanced, heftily flavoured stew of available, sustainable local fish is what I want, and this was it.

Neil had big, fresh, muscly hake on wilted Baby Gem lettuce from the specials menu and a brilliant, light, fluffy "berry Eton mess". I had excellent artisanal ice cream (ginger, rum and raisin, maple and pecan). The coffee was top-notch and came simultaneously with the desserts, which restaurants so rarely manage to do (it's the small things sometimes...).

Aside from all that, Lussmanns recycles 70 per cent of its waste for electricity which goes onto the national grid, orders as conservatively as it can and tries to throw no fish away at all ("What's the point of buying sustainable fish," the manager said to me, "if you end up throwing it away at the end of the night?"), does a lot of charity work and offers a three-course lunch for £13.95.

Lussmanns is, in fact, everything a modern local restaurant should be, so thank heavens for that.

Lussmanns

Waxhouse Gate, St Albans, Hertfordshire (01727 851941; lussmanns.com)

Cooking: 7

Local nous: 9

Sustainability: 8 (The SRA said, "Lussmanns has just won the RSPCA Good Business Award for independent restaurants, highlighting its standards for sourcing ethically reared meat, it is rated in the Top Ten restaurants in the UK by Fish2fork owing to dealing with independent suppliers who source from day boats, and it scored highly in the waste management section.")

Score: 8

Price: I paid £64 for two, plus £33 for a bottle of Sancerre rosé.